



Virtual Jumu'ah Prayer: Debates, Challenges, and Scholar Perspectives Amidst The COVID-19 Pandemic

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Received: 18-06-2024

Reviewed: 03-07-2024

Accepted: 18-07-2024

Abstract

Jumu'ah, regarded as the pinnacle of the weekly Islamic worship, mandates ritual purification, donning immaculate attire, and congregating at the mosque for Friday Prayer. However, the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic has necessitated adaptations in religious practices, compelling Muslims to pivot towards virtual modes of worship in compliance with directives issued by governmental and health authorities aimed at mitigating the transmission of the coronavirus. The transition to virtual or online prayer has sparked considerable theological discourse and scrutiny in light of the pandemic's challenges. Consequently, this research aims to rigorously examine the doctrinal perspectives on virtual Friday prayer. Employing a comprehensive qualitative methodology, this study undertakes a detailed descriptive analysis. Findings underscore ongoing theological debates among Muslim scholars worldwide, including in Indonesia, where divergent viewpoints exist regarding the permissibility of participating in Jumu'ah prayer remotely via broadcast or live streaming under any theological school (madhhab). Critics argue against virtual congregational prayer due to logistical challenges posed by physical distancing, asserting that the spatial and communal integrity essential to Islamic worship may be compromised. Conversely, proponents advocate for a pragmatic approach, invoking the principle of *maslahat* (public interest) to safeguard the continuity of Friday prayers amidst unprecedented circumstances. In conclusion, this study contributes to the scholarly discourse on contemporary Islamic jurisprudence by elucidating the multifaceted debates surrounding virtual Jumu'ah prayer during the COVID-19 pandemic, reflecting diverse interpretations and applications of Islamic law in response to evolving global challenges.

Keywords: Prayer, COVID-19, Pandemic, Jumu'ah

Introduction

Prayer is regarded as one of the primary forms of worship intended to foster a closer connection with Allah SWT, constituting a cornerstone of Islamic teachings. Its significance is underscored by its central role in spiritual devotion, as emphasized in Islamic literature (Al-Haqiqi, 2020), positioning it above all other forms of worship due to its pivotal importance in the believer's spiritual journey and relationship with the Divine.

رَبِّ اجْعَلْنِي مُقِيمَ الصَّلَاةِ وَمِنْ ذُرِّيَّتِي رَبَّنَا وَتَقَبَّلْ دُعَاءِ

“My Lord, make me an establisher of prayer, and many from my descendants. Our Lord, and accept my supplication.” (QS: Ibrahim: 40)

The establishment and deepening of one's adherence to Islam are intricately linked to the regularity, sincerity, and spiritual depth of one's salat performance. Engaging in salat consistently not only ensures a continuous flow of divine blessings (Sahil, 2020) but also represents a pivotal means of accessing the gates of paradise. As articulated by Sahil (2020), salat serves as a transformative practice that aligns one's soul with the divine will and fosters spiritual growth.

Moreover, prayer functions as a defining criterion between adherents of Islam and those who do not follow the faith, a distinction underscored by the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). He emphasized that prayer constitutes a clear demarcation between believers and non-believers (Suparman, 2015), highlighting its foundational role in Islamic identity and spiritual commitment. This perspective underscores prayer's central position in the daily lives of Muslims, serving not only as a personal act of worship but also as a communal practice that unites believers in their devotion to Allah. Furthermore, the significance of prayer extends beyond individual spirituality to encompass broader societal cohesion and moral guidance, reflecting the ethical framework and teachings of Islam.

On the contrary, the observance of Friday prayers is explicitly mandated within the foundational pillars and criteria outlined in Shariah, stipulating its performance in congregation at the mosque. Participating in congregational (Friday) prayers not only fulfills a religious obligation but also promises significant spiritual rewards for the Muslim community. According to Rohman (2017), every step taken by a worshipper on their journey to and from the mosque during Friday prayers is meticulously recorded by angels, underscoring the profound spiritual merit associated with this collective act of worship.

Furthermore, the act of praying in congregation at the mosque signifies devout obedience to Allah's directives as elucidated in the Qur'an. This communal practice not only strengthens individual faith but also fosters unity and solidarity among Muslims, reinforcing their shared commitment to spiritual devotion and community welfare (Salim, 2022). The significance of congregational Friday prayers extends beyond mere ritual observance to embody core Islamic values of communal worship, mutual support, and adherence to divine guidance, thereby enriching the spiritual fabric of Muslim society.

وَأَقِيمُوا الصَّلَاةَ وَءَاتُوا الزَّكَاةَ وَارْكَعُوا مَعَ الرَّاكِعِينَ

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“And establish prayer and give zakāh and bow with those who bow in worship and obedience.” (QS: al-Baqarah: 43)

However, as the global community contends with the pervasive threat posed by the highly contagious and potentially fatal disease, COVID-19, which has posed unprecedented risks to public health and safety (Masrul & etl, 2020), religious communities have found themselves compelled to implement stringent measures to curb the spread of the virus. These measures have necessitated the temporary suspension or restriction of traditional forms of communal worship, prompting widespread discussions and proposals from religious groups, both domestically and internationally (Yaakub et al., 2022). Many of these groups have advocated for the adaptation of Friday prayers to online platforms such as live streaming, radio broadcasts, and other digital formats (Azman, 2020).

This shift towards virtual modes of religious practice reflects a collective effort to balance the imperative of spiritual continuity with the imperative of safeguarding public health during the COVID-19 pandemic (Christanti et al., 2023)v. It underscores the adaptability and resilience of religious communities in responding to unprecedented challenges, while also highlighting their commitment to ensuring the safety and well-being of worshippers and the broader community (Stańdo et al., 2022). These innovative approaches not only facilitate continued religious observance but also serve as a testament to the capacity of faith communities to adapt and evolve in the face of crisis (Azman, 2020).

The trend of virtual Friday prayers amid the COVID-19 pandemic has extended beyond Finland and the United States. For instance, in May 2020, Indonesian religious groups began utilizing platforms like Zoom Virtual Meeting to conduct Friday prayers online, a practice that gained traction and was widely shared across various social media channels (Firdaus, 2021). This shift towards virtual religious gatherings during times of crisis reflects a broader global adaptation among Muslim communities to ensure continuity of spiritual practice while adhering to public health guidelines (Qotadah & Achmad, 2021).

Given the growing prevalence of virtual Friday prayers at that time, it becomes imperative to conduct a thorough analysis and investigation of this phenomenon from an Islamic perspective. Such an examination would delve into theological, jurisprudential, and communal dimensions, exploring questions of legitimacy, efficacy, and the spiritual significance of virtual worship. Understanding these aspects is crucial for both scholars and practitioners seeking to navigate the complexities of religious practice in contemporary contexts marked by unforeseen challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

Literature Review

Satori and Agung (2017) conducted comprehensive research on the various adaptations in Friday prayer practices necessitated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Their study underscores the critical importance of adhering to health protocols, such as social distancing, wearing masks, and limiting the number of congregants, to prevent the spread of the virus. These measures are essential to protect both individual health and public safety during religious

gatherings. Additionally, the review explores the flexibility within Islamic jurisprudence to accommodate these unprecedented changes, highlighting how scholars and religious leaders have interpreted and adjusted traditional practices to ensure that religious obligations and public health considerations are maintained in tandem.

The study employs comprehensive literature review methods, utilizing a range of data collection techniques such as documentation, textual analysis, and case studies to thoroughly analyze the situation. This approach provides a well-rounded understanding of the evolving landscape of Islamic worship during the pandemic, capturing both immediate responses and considering broader implications for future religious practices in a post-pandemic world. The findings underscore the necessity of adapting Friday prayers to adhere to health protocols, thereby ensuring the safety of worshippers during the COVID-19 pandemic. This adaptation is crucial not only for individual well-being but also for the collective effort to combat the spread of COVID-19 and protect the community at large, reinforcing the importance of flexible and responsive religious practices in times of crisis.

Research Method

In alignment with the ongoing research on the virtual performance of Jumu'ah prayer during the COVID-19 pandemic, the study adopts a qualitative approach, consistent with methodologies commonly utilized in Shari'a studies, social sciences, and humanities. Qualitative research methods are employed to construct knowledge by exploring and comprehending textual and contextual situations. This approach aims to delve into the social phenomena surrounding the adaptation of religious practices in response to contemporary challenges, including societal norms and ethical considerations. Through qualitative inquiry, the study aims to produce a nuanced and comprehensive analysis, gathering insights from multiple perspectives and conducting exploratory studies in natural settings (Rukin, 2019). The literature review method is also integrated into this discussion, facilitating a constructive examination of existing disciplinary studies in the field. This combined approach enriches the investigation by synthesizing theoretical insights with empirical findings, contributing to a deeper understanding of the implications and complexities involved in virtual Jumu'ah prayer practices during the pandemic.

Result and Discussion

The Significance of Jumu'ah Prayer

Salat, a foundational pillar of Islamic worship, serves as a profound means to deepen one's connection with Allah SWT, distinguished as the most significant prayer within the Islamic tradition. It holds a pivotal role in spiritual practice, recognized as the gateway to attaining divine favor and the keys to heaven (Sahil, 2020). Linguistically, salat derives from Arabic, meaning prayer, and every utterance during salat is imbued with supplication and praise (Zaitun, 2013). According to Islamic jurisprudence (fuqahā), salat encompasses specific words

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and actions beginning with takbir and concluding with salam, performed under prescribed conditions to worship Allah SWT (Ramli, 2003).

Regarding Friday prayer (Salat al-Jumu'ah), fuqahā unanimously declare it as fardhu ain, an obligatory act mandated by the Quran, Sunnah (traditions of Prophet Muhammad), and Ijmā' (consensus of scholars). Imam al-Syafi'i underscores its obligatory nature as affirmed in Islamic scripture (Idris et al., 2021). The Friday prayer holds particular significance as a communal obligation binding upon all able-bodied Muslims, reinforcing unity and collective worship among believers. In contemporary contexts, understanding the theological and legal foundations of salat, especially Friday prayer, provides insights into its enduring importance and relevance in Muslim societies worldwide. This knowledge informs the adaptation of religious practices amidst challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, prompting discussions on virtual formats while upholding the sanctity and obligations of Islamic worship rituals.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا إِذَا نُودِيَ لِلصَّلَاةِ مِنْ يَوْمِ الْجُمُعَةِ فَاسْعَوْا إِلَىٰ ذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَذَرُوا الْبَيْعَ ذَلِكُمْ خَيْرٌ لَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ تَعْلَمُونَ

“O you who have believed, when the adhān is called for the prayer on the day of Jumu'ah, then proceed to the remembrance of Allah and leave trade. That is better for you, if you only knew.” (QS: al-Jumu'ah:9)

Hadith said:

عَنْ طَارِقِ بْنِ شِهَابٍ عَنِ النَّبِيِّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ الْجُمُعَةُ حَقٌّ وَاجِبٌ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ مُسْلِمٍ فِي جَمَاعَةٍ إِلَّا أَرْبَعَةً عَبْدٌ مَمْلُوكٌ أَوْ امْرَأَةٌ أَوْ صَبِيٌّ أَوْ مَرِيضٌ

“Narrated Tariq ibn Shihab: The Prophet PBUH said: The Friday prayer in congregation is a necessary duty for every Muslim, with four exceptions; a slave, a woman, a boy, and a sick person (Al-Sijistānī, 1950).”

Friday holds a unique significance within Islam, as it is a day divinely bestowed upon the ummah (community) of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), distinguishing it from previous ummahs. This distinction is supported by various theological arguments affirming the special status of Friday. Notably, scholars like Jalaluddin al-Suyuthi, in his work "al-Lum'ah Fi Khasha-ish Yaum al-Jumu'ah," explicitly detail the virtues and blessings associated with Friday (Bih, 2020). In discussing the merits of Friday, several propositions highlight its esteemed position within Islamic teachings. These include traditions and scholarly interpretations emphasizing the spiritual rewards and opportunities for worship that Friday offers to believers. The day is regarded as a time for congregational prayers, during which Muslims gather in mosques to perform Salat al-Jumu'ah, a communal obligation that strengthens communal bonds and spiritual connection with Allah SWT (Efrinaldi, 2022).

Moreover, Friday is considered a day of forgiveness and mercy, with prayers and supplications being particularly efficacious on this blessed day. Understanding the theological and scholarly perspectives on Friday underscores its importance in Islamic practice and belief, guiding Muslims in their observance of weekly rituals and spiritual devotion. This recognition informs discussions on the significance of Friday prayer and its relevance in contemporary

contexts, where Muslims seek to uphold religious obligations while navigating challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Efrinaldi, 2022).

قَالَ النَّبِيُّ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ إِنَّ يَوْمَ الْجُمُعَةِ سَيِّدُ الْأَيَّامِ وَأَعْظَمُهَا عِنْدَ اللَّهِ وَهُوَ أَعْظَمُ عِنْدَ اللَّهِ مِنْ يَوْمِ الْأَضْحَى وَيَوْمِ الْفِطْرِ فِيهِ خَمْسٌ خَلَقَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ آدَمَ وَأَهْبَطَ اللَّهُ فِيهِ آدَمَ إِلَى الْأَرْضِ وَفِيهِ تَوَفَّى اللَّهُ آدَمَ وَفِيهِ سَاعَةٌ لَا يَسْأَلُ اللَّهُ فِيهَا الْعَبْدُ شَيْئًا إِلَّا أَعْطَاهُ مَا لَمْ يَسْأَلْ حَرَامًا وَفِيهِ تَقُومُ السَّاعَةُ مَا مِنْ مَلَكٍ مُقَرَّبٍ وَلَا سَمَاءٍ وَلَا أَرْضٍ وَلَا رِيحٍ وَلَا جِبَالٍ وَلَا بَحْرٍ إِلَّا وَهْنٌ يُشْفِقُنَّ مِنْ يَوْمِ الْجُمُعَةِ

“The Prophet PBUH said: Friday is the master of days, and the greatest of them before Allaah. It is greater before Allaah than the day of al-Adha and the day of al-Fitr. It has five characteristics: on this day Allaah created Adam, on it He sent Adam down to the earth, on it Allaah caused Adam to die, on it there is a time when a person does not ask Allaah for anything but He gives it to him, so long as he does not ask for anything haraam, and on it the Hour will begin. There is no angel who is close to Allaah, no heaven, no earth, no wind, no mountain and no sea that does not fear Friday (Al-Qazwini, 1460H).”

In addition to its designation by Allah SWT as a significant day for Muslims, Friday holds a revered position in Islam, often referred to as *sayyidul ayyam*, meaning the "leader" or "chief" of days in a week (Bih, 2020). This special status underscores its importance as a time for communal worship and reflection, marking it as a day of collective spiritual renewal and guidance within the Islamic calendar. Muslims are encouraged to extol the greatness of Friday as a means of promoting the values and teachings of Islam to others. Central to this practice is the obligatory nature of Friday prayers (Salat al-Jumu'ah), which holds a pivotal role in the religious obligations of Muslims. Failure to attend Friday prayers without valid reason is considered sinful, emphasizing the importance of adhering to this weekly ritual as prescribed by Islamic teachings (Efrinaldi, 2022).

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic, which necessitated restrictions on public gatherings including religious services, many Muslims maintained their fervor for Friday prayers. Some adherents innovatively turned to virtual or online platforms to uphold the significance of Friday prayer, albeit with varying viewpoints among Muslim scholars regarding the validity of virtual congregational worship. The resilience and adaptability of Muslim communities during this time reflect their commitment to spiritual continuity and adherence to religious duties, while also navigating contemporary challenges. This ongoing discourse among scholars highlights the dynamic nature of Islamic jurisprudence in responding to unprecedented circumstances, ensuring the preservation and relevance of religious practices in diverse global contexts (Efrinaldi, 2022).

Navigating the Practice of Prayer Amid the Challenges Posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic

Since the onset of the Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) in 2019, the global community, including Indonesia, has grappled with multifaceted challenges arising from this unprecedented pandemic. As of May 25, 2021, statistical data reveals staggering figures: globally, 168,032,095 confirmed cases of COVID-19 have been reported, with 149,371,968 individuals having recovered, and tragically, 3,488,576 lives lost (Worldmeter, 2021). In

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Indonesia alone, there have been 1,786,187 confirmed cases, with 1,642,074 recoveries and 49,627 fatalities attributed to the virus. The far-reaching impact of the COVID-19 pandemic extends across diverse facets of human existence, profoundly affecting economic, political, and educational sectors worldwide. Moreover, the pandemic has significantly influenced social activities and religious practices, including the way communities engage in religious worship, such as prayers among Muslims globally (Khifzhon Azwar & Setiati, 2020).

The unprecedented scale and duration of the COVID-19 crisis have necessitated unprecedented responses, including widespread lockdowns, social distancing measures, and the adaptation of religious rituals to adhere to public health guidelines. In this context, Muslim communities have faced challenges in observing traditional practices, leading to innovative approaches such as virtual gatherings and online prayer services to sustain spiritual connections while ensuring safety (El-Majzoub et al., 2021). The ongoing discourse and adaptation within religious communities underscore the resilience and adaptability of individuals and institutions in navigating these extraordinary circumstances. This period has prompted reflection on the role of faith in times of crisis, highlighting both the challenges and opportunities for spiritual growth and communal solidarity amid global adversity (del Castillo et al., 2020).

The government, alongside various religious organizations such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI), Muhammadiyah, NU, and others, has undertaken extensive efforts to address concerns regarding religious practices amidst the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. These efforts encompass the regulation and adaptation of worship activities, including prayers, in response to the health risks posed by COVID-19. There exists a unified stance among governmental authorities and religious bodies in advocating for precautionary measures, emphasizing the suspension or modification of obligatory (*fardhu*) and recommended (*sunnah*) prayers. This collective approach is grounded in the principles of *maslahah* (public interest) and *mafsadah* (harm), as guided by Maqashid al-Shariah (objectives of Islamic law) (Hanafi et al., 2023).

Unified in their stance, these entities advocate for precautionary measures to mitigate the spread of the virus, aligning their decisions with the principles of *maslahah* (public interest) and *mafsadah* (harm avoidance) rooted in Maqasid al-Shariah (objectives of Islamic law). Islam, characterized as *al-Wasathiyah al-Islamiyyah* in Arabic, emphasizes moderation and balance in all aspects of life, including religious practices. It promotes ease and convenience for its adherents, reflecting the prophetic tradition that Allah SWT desires facilitation for humanity and discourages hardship, as exemplified in the hadith narrated by Ibn Abbas that verily Allah has pardoned or been lenient with for me my ummah: their mistakes, their forgetfulness, and that which they have been forced to do under duress (Mashuri et al., 2021). This teaching underscores the flexibility within Islamic jurisprudence to adapt to exceptional circumstances, ensuring the preservation of faith while safeguarding public health. The collaborative efforts of governmental bodies and religious institutions highlight their commitment to responsible decision-making and the well-being of the community amidst unprecedented global challenges.

إِنَّ الدِّينَ يُسْرٌ، وَلَنْ يُشَادَّ الدِّينَ أَحَدٌ إِلَّا غَلَبَهُ، فَسَدِّدُوا وَقَارِبُوا وَأَبْشِرُوا، وَاسْتَعِينُوا بِالْعَدْوَةِ وَالرَّوْحَةِ
وَشَيْءٍ مِنَ الدَّلْجَةِ

The Prophet PBUH said: "The religion (of Islam) is easy, and whoever makes the religion a rigour, it will overpower him. So, follow a middle course (in worship); if you can't do this, do something near to it and give glad tidings and seek help (of Allah) at morn and at dusk and some part of night (Ibn Baṭṭāl, 2003)."

يُرِيدُ اللَّهُ بِكُمْ الْيُسْرَ وَلَا يُرِيدُ بِكُمْ الْعُسْرَ

"Allah intends for you ease and does not intend for you hardship". (QS: Al-Baqarah: 185)

This hadith underscores the simplicity and ease inherent in the divine law revealed by Allah to Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). Islam is not burdensome; rather, it alleviates hardships and is designed for the well-being of humanity. Allah SWT, as stated in the Qur'an, does not impose upon His servants anything beyond their capacity. This principle affirms the compassionate nature of Islamic teachings, which prioritize facilitation and practicality in religious obligations. The hadith further encourages believers to adopt a balanced approach in worship, emphasizing flexibility and acknowledging human limitations. This flexibility is a testament to the mercy and wisdom inherent in Islamic guidance, accommodating diverse circumstances and ensuring spiritual fulfillment without undue hardship.

Allah SWT has granted numerous concessions (*rukhsah*) in the practice of worship, illustrating His mercy and consideration for human capabilities. Examples include the permission to break the fast for the sick or travelers during Ramadan, as well as the allowance to perform prayers while sitting if one is unable to stand. These concessions demonstrate the flexibility inherent in Islamic teachings, accommodating various circumstances and ensuring that religious duties remain feasible and meaningful. In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, these concessions can also be applied judiciously to safeguard public health, including the temporary restriction of congregational prayers in mosques during outbreaks (Maravia, 2020).

According to Maqasid al-Shariah, the overarching objectives of Islamic law, all activities and worship must uphold the preservation of religion, life, intellect, progeny, and wealth. This holistic approach ensures that Islamic practices contribute positively to individual and communal well-being. Furthermore, Islamic jurisprudence prioritizes the prevention of harm (*mafsadat*) over the pursuit of benefits (*maslahat*), as articulated in the legal maxim '*dar'u al-mafāsīd muqaddamun 'alā jalbi al-maṣāliḥ*'. This principle underscores the proactive stance in mitigating risks and minimizing potential harm to individuals and society. By adhering to this principle, Muslims are encouraged to exercise caution and adopt measures that protect public health and safety, even if it entails temporary adjustments in religious practices (Maravia, 2020).

أَنَّ رَسُولَ اللَّهِ صَلَّى اللَّهُ عَلَيْهِ وَسَلَّمَ قَالَ إِذَا سَمِعْتُمْ بِهِ بِأَرْضٍ فَلَا تَقْدُمُوا عَلَيْهِ وَإِذَا وَقَعَ بِأَرْضٍ وَأَنْتُمْ بِهَا فَلَا
تَخْرُجُوا فِرَارًا مِنْهُ

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The Prophet PBUH said: "If you hear the news of an outbreak of an epidemic (plague) in a certain place, do not enter that place: and if the epidemic falls in a place while you are present in it, do not leave that place to escape from the epidemic (Khalaf, 1982)."

And Hadith,

فَلَيْسَ مِنْ عَبْدٍ يَفْعُ الطَّاعُونَ فَيَمُوتُ فِي بَلَدِهِ صَابِرًا، يَعْلَمُ أَنَّهُ لَنْ يُصِيبَهُ إِلَّا مَا كَتَبَ اللَّهُ لَهُ، إِلَّا كَانَ لَهُ مِثْلُ أَجْرِ الشَّهِيدِ

"None (among the believers) remains patient in a land in which plague has broken out and considers that nothing will befall him except what Allah has ordained for him, but that Allah will grant him a reward similar to that of a martyr (Al-Hamzawi, 2014)."

During the unprecedented and challenging times brought about by the COVID-19 pandemic, it is of utmost importance for Muslims to prioritize their health, safety, and overall well-being. This directive is firmly rooted in the prophetic tradition, which emphasizes the necessity of taking responsible and proactive measures to combat the spread of the virus and safeguard public health. The hadith, or sayings of the Prophet Muhammad, strongly emphasize the responsibility of each individual to protect themselves and others from harm. One of the critical strategies recommended to mitigate the spread and transmission of COVID-19 is the practice of maintaining social distancing and adhering to stay-at-home measures (Efrinaldi, 2022).

These actions are not merely precautionary but are essential to breaking the chain of transmission of the virus, thereby significantly reducing the risk of infections and fatalities within communities. In light of these requirements, all forms of worship, including the highly significant Friday prayers, must be adapted to be performed within the safety of one's home rather than in congregational settings such as mosques and other public venues. This measure is not only a practical step towards ensuring the health and safety of the community but also a reflection of the principle of prioritizing public health and safety, which is a core tenet of Islamic teachings. This principle emphasizes the preservation of life, known as *hifz al-nafs*, as a fundamental objective (Mashuri et al., 2021).

By strictly adhering to these guidelines, Muslims demonstrate their commitment to the well-being of the community as a whole and fulfill their religious obligations in a manner that minimizes harm and promotes resilience during these difficult times. This approach also showcases the flexibility and adaptability of Islamic jurisprudence, which is capable of responding to contemporary challenges while ensuring that religious practices remain meaningful and relevant. Moreover, these adaptations highlight the enduring relevance of Islamic jurisprudence, which continues to offer a robust framework for addressing current issues. This ensures that the faith remains a source of guidance, support, and inspiration, even in the most challenging circumstances. It also underscores the dynamic nature of Islamic law, which is instrumental in promoting human welfare and justice in an ever-changing world (Efrinaldi, 2022).

Furthermore, the willingness of Muslims to adapt their religious practices in response to the pandemic exemplifies the resilience and relevance of Islamic jurisprudence. This adaptability ensures that Islamic teachings remain pertinent and effective in addressing the evolving challenges of the modern world. It also serves as a testament to the enduring wisdom of Islamic law, which continues to guide believers through times of crisis by providing a framework that balances religious obligations with the imperative to protect public health and safety (El-Majzoub et al., 2021).

The Pros and Cons of Engaging in Virtual Jumu'ah Prayer Amid the Pandemic

At that time, the issue of conducting Friday sermons and prayers online has sparked considerable debate among Muslims, both in Indonesia and in Western countries, where Muslim minority communities may feel isolated due to prolonged lockdowns that have restricted public gatherings. This unprecedented situation has led to diverse opinions within the Muslim scholarly community, highlighting the complexity and sensitivity of the matter. On one side, some Islamic scholars have primarily drawn on the perspectives of classical scholars when addressing this issue. These scholars stress the traditional requirements for congregational prayers (*jamā'ah*), which include physical proximity and the absence of significant physical barriers between worshippers (Hafil, 2021a).

According to their interpretations, an unreasonable space between the lines of the congregation disrupts the integrity and unity of the prayer. This perspective concludes that performing *Jum'ah* prayers in a dispersed manner, with many households praying miles apart, does not meet the essential criteria for a valid congregational prayer. Scholars like Hegazy (2020), argue that the physical and spiritual connection of the congregation is paramount, and this cannot be achieved through virtual means where participants are isolated in their individual homes.

Furthermore, this traditionalist viewpoint underscores the importance of the communal experience inherent in *Jum'ah* prayers. The physical gathering of Muslims in one place for the Friday sermon and prayer is seen as a manifestation of the unity and brotherhood that Islam promotes. It is during these gatherings that the community not only fulfills their religious obligations but also reinforces social bonds, shares communal concerns, and receives collective spiritual upliftment. The argument here is that virtual platforms, despite their technological capabilities, cannot replicate the profound communal and spiritual experience that occurs in a mosque setting (Saabiq, 1985).

In addition to these theological considerations, there are practical concerns that support the traditionalist stance. For instance, the potential technical issues that could arise during an online prayer session—such as internet disruptions, power outages, or device malfunctions—pose significant risks to the continuity and sanctity of the prayer. If a worshipper loses connection or their device fails during the prayer, it could invalidate their participation and disrupt their spiritual concentration. These practical challenges further complicate the feasibility and acceptability of online *Jum'ah* prayers (Saabiq, 1985).

Abdurrahman al-Jaziri in his book "*al-Fiqh 'Alâ al-Madzâhib al-Arba'ah*" elucidates that according to the four major Sunni madhhabs (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafî'i, and Hanbali), with

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the exception of Imam Abu Hanifah's personal view, if a man prays congregationally in a house where the imam is in the mosque but the house is separated from the mosque by a road or something similar, the congregation is invalid because it differs from place to place (Al-Jaziri, 2019). This stipulation highlights the importance of spatial continuity in congregational prayers, which is rooted in the traditional interpretations of Islamic jurisprudence. For instance, a hadith of the Prophet PBUH emphasizes the importance of physical proximity in prayer: "Straighten your rows and keep close together, for indeed I see you from behind my back" (At-Tabrizi, 2012).

According to the fuqahā (Islamic jurists), there is a crucial condition that must be met when implementing Friday prayers, namely, al-Ittishol al-Makaani (continuation of the place). This means that the imam and the congregation must be in the same physical location to fulfill the requirements of a valid congregational prayer. This condition is particularly emphasized in the context of Friday prayers, where the communal aspect is of paramount importance. The continuity of place ensures that the congregation is united in their worship, both physically and spiritually.

لا يجوز للإنسان أن يتابع الإمام بواسطة التلفزيون ولا بواسطة الإذاعة؛ وذلك لأن من شرط المتابعة أن يكون الإنسان في المكان الذي فيه الإمام

"It is not permitted for a person to conduct a prayer either through TV or radio due to the fact that one of the requirements for following the imam in prayer is mutaaba'ah where that person should be present when the Imam prays."

Sheikh 'Abdul Aziz bin Baz said;

أما الصلاة.. مع الإمام الذي يسمعه في الإذاعة أو في التلفاز فلا، أو يراه في التلفاز فلا

"It is not permissible for him to pray with an Imam he hears on the radio or sees on TV."

This condition, however, cannot be met during the practice of virtual Friday prayers, where the imam and the congregation are in separate locations. If people perform virtual Friday prayers via radio, TV, Zoom, or other online platforms, this requirement is not fulfilled, resulting in the invalidity of the prayer as conveyed by several fatwas (Hegazy, 2020). The physical separation between the imam and the congregation disrupts the necessary spatial continuity, thereby compromising the integrity of the congregational prayer.

Sheikh Ibn 'Uthaimin Rahimahullah further elaborates on this point, emphasizing that the essence of congregational prayer lies in the unity and proximity of the worshippers. The spatial continuity not only facilitates the physical arrangement of rows but also symbolizes the spiritual cohesion of the Muslim community. The separation caused by virtual platforms undermines this cohesion, leading to the conclusion that such prayers do not fulfill the traditional criteria of congregational worship. Moreover, the traditional scholars underscore that the communal experience of Jumu'ah prayers goes beyond mere auditory and visual connection. The presence of the congregation in a single location fosters a sense of solidarity and collective worship that is integral to the spiritual experience of Friday prayers. This

communal aspect is diminished in virtual settings, where participants are isolated in their individual spaces, thus detracting from the overall spiritual ambiance (Al-'Uthaymeen, 2015).

The traditional viewpoint, as articulated by scholars like Abdurrahman al-Jaziri and Sheikh Ibn 'Uthaimin, highlights the indispensability of spatial continuity in congregational prayers. The practice of virtual Friday prayers, while a response to extraordinary circumstances such as the COVID-19 pandemic, does not meet the established criteria for a valid Jumu'ah prayer due to the lack of physical proximity between the imam and the congregation. This perspective underscores the importance of adhering to traditional practices to maintain the integrity and spiritual significance of congregational worship in Islam. Thus, those who are watching and listening to the sermon online, according to these scholars, cannot perform the two units of Friday prayers (Jumu'ah) but should instead offer the noon Dhuhr prayers. This concession, or *rukhsah*, is granted by Allah based on the propositions of al-Qur'an and hadith previously mentioned, acknowledging the exceptional circumstances.

Yasir Qadhi, a prominent Muslim scholar and a member of the Fiqh Council of North America, has emphasized that even if the khutbah (Friday sermon) is broadcast live, it does not fulfill the requirement of a Friday sermon for those who are listening to it from their homes. This is because, according to all legal schools, an unreasonable gap between the lines disrupts a congregational prayer (jamā'ah). As a result, there is no valid jamā'ah when numerous households are praying thousands of miles apart. Consequently, they should perform the four rak'at Dhuhr prayer in place of the regular Jumu'ah prayer (Qadhi, 2020). Yasir Qadhi's viewpoint has been echoed by major Islamic organizations such as the Indonesian Ulema Council (MUI) (Hafil, 2021b), Muhammadiyah (Syahida et al., 2023), and Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) (Millah, 2024), which have all agreed that the conditions for a valid congregational Friday prayer cannot be met in a virtual setting.

These organizations emphasize that the principles of Islamic jurisprudence, or fiqh, require physical proximity among the congregants to establish a legitimate Friday prayer. This stance is rooted in the traditional understanding of congregational worship, where the physical presence of the imam and the congregation in a shared space is essential. Furthermore, the agreement among these scholars and organizations highlights the importance of adhering to the principles of Islamic law, even in extraordinary situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic. The *rukhsah*, or legal concession, provided in this context is a reflection of Islam's inherent flexibility and its consideration for the well-being of its adherents. By allowing the substitution of the Jumu'ah prayer with the Dhuhr prayer, Islamic law provides a practical solution that aligns with the overarching goal of preserving health and safety. In addition, the consensus among scholars underscores the significance of unity and consistency in the practice of religious duties (Syahida et al., 2023).

This unified stance helps to prevent confusion and ensures that Muslims have clear guidance on how to navigate their religious obligations during unprecedented times. It also demonstrates the adaptability of Islamic jurisprudence in responding to contemporary challenges while maintaining fidelity to traditional legal principles. Moreover, this perspective emphasizes the compassionate and pragmatic aspects of Islamic teachings. By advocating for the Dhuhr prayer as a substitute for the Jumu'ah prayer during the pandemic, scholars and

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organizations are prioritizing the health and safety of the Muslim community. This approach not only mitigates the risk of virus transmission but also aligns with the broader Islamic principle of preventing harm (*dar al-mafasid*) over pursuing benefits (*jalb al-masalih*).

The position taken by Yasir Qadhi, the Fiqh Council of North America, the Indonesian Ulema Council, Muhammadiyah, and Nahdlatul Ulama reflects a coherent and compassionate response to the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic. By recommending the Dhuhr prayer as a substitute for the Jumu'ah prayer, these scholars and organizations are upholding the integrity of Islamic worship while ensuring the well-being of the Muslim community. This stance is a testament to the flexibility and wisdom inherent in Islamic jurisprudence, demonstrating its ability to adapt to contemporary issues while maintaining its core principles.

On the other hand, at that time there is a growing recognition among other scholars and Muslim communities of the need to adapt to the extraordinary circumstances imposed by the COVID-19 pandemic. These scholars advocate for a more flexible interpretation of Islamic jurisprudence, considering the overarching objectives of Shariah, which include the preservation of life and the facilitation of religious practice under challenging conditions. They argue that the use of virtual platforms for Jum'ah prayers can be seen as a temporary measure to ensure that Muslims can continue to fulfill their religious obligations while adhering to public health guidelines. This adaptive approach seeks to balance the traditional requirements of Jum'ah prayers with the necessity of maintaining public health and safety. It acknowledges the unique context of the pandemic, where physical gatherings pose a significant risk of virus transmission.

By endorsing virtual Jum'ah prayers, these scholars aim to provide a practical solution that preserves the spirit of communal worship while prioritizing the health and well-being of the community. Hegazy (2020) argues that his perspective is rooted in the Islamic legal principle of "*dharura*" (necessity), which allows for flexibility in religious practices in exceptional circumstances. Some scholars opine that virtual prayer serves as an urgent alternative solution for preserving the symbolic value of prayer in Muslim life, arguing that it is an ideal way to help maintain the significance of religious practices and the mosque's status in the hearts of Muslims during extraordinary circumstances. They assert that virtual prayer allows Muslims to continue their communal worship in a manner that respects the traditional aspects of their faith while adapting to contemporary challenges.

For instance, Mauritanian scholar Muhammad al-Hassan Ould al-Dadaw al-Shanqiti, born in 1963, has defended the legitimacy of online prayer by discussing the mechanics of how sound waves work to transmit the Imam's voice to his followers. He has studied how microphones and radio technology transmit sound simultaneously, ensuring that the followers can hear the Imam in real-time. His argument is that, even though the physical presence is missing, the live transmission of the Imam's voice creates a sense of immediate connection between the Imam and the congregation. Al-Shanqiti's fatwa, as well as those of other muftis supporting the legitimacy of virtual prayer, have often emphasized that this form of worship should be restricted to live broadcasts rather than pre-recorded sessions. This distinction is crucial because it preserves the immediacy and real-time nature of traditional congregational

prayers, which is an essential component of their spiritual and communal significance (Hegazy, 2020).

The live aspect of the broadcast ensures that the worshippers are participating in the prayer simultaneously, maintaining the unity and collective experience that is central to Islamic worship practices. Furthermore, proponents of virtual prayer highlight the importance of adaptability in Islamic jurisprudence, especially in times of crisis. They argue that the preservation of the core elements of worship and community connection can be achieved through innovative means that respect both the letter and the spirit of Islamic law. This perspective underscores the dynamic nature of Islamic jurisprudence, which has historically adapted to various cultural, technological, and social changes while maintaining its foundational principles (Hegazy, 2020).

In their defense of virtual prayer, these scholars also stress the necessity of preserving the symbolic value of religious practices, especially during times when traditional modes of worship are disrupted. They contend that the ability to adapt to changing circumstances without compromising the essence of the prayer is a testament to the resilience and relevance of Islamic teachings. This approach ensures that Muslims can continue to fulfill their religious obligations and sustain their spiritual well-being, even in the face of unprecedented challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, the support for virtual prayer by scholars like al-Shanqiti reflects a broader commitment to the well-being of the Muslim community. By advocating for solutions that enable safe and meaningful worship, these scholars demonstrate a deep understanding of the practical realities faced by Muslims worldwide. Their efforts to provide religious guidance that is both theologically sound and practically feasible highlight the compassionate and thoughtful nature of Islamic scholarship (Abdullah, 2020).

In conclusion, the opinion that virtual prayer is an urgent alternative solution for preserving the symbolic value of prayer in Muslim life represents a significant and thoughtful response to contemporary challenges. Scholars like Muhammad al-Hassan Ould al-Dadaw al-Shanqiti have articulated compelling arguments for the legitimacy of online prayer, emphasizing the importance of live broadcasts to maintain the immediacy and communal aspects of worship. This perspective underscores the adaptability of Islamic jurisprudence and the ongoing commitment of scholars to ensure that Muslims can continue to practice their faith meaningfully and safely in times of crisis (Hegazy, 2020).

Conclusion

As we have delineated the divergent perspectives on the practice of virtual Friday prayer, particularly in emergency situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, practical observations reveal that while Friday prayers are conducted online, congregants can engage with the imam's recitation and sermon via live streaming on devices like cellphones or laptops. However, the physical separation of the imam and congregation by the walls of homes or offices poses challenges. Moreover, participants may encounter difficulties such as device battery depletion, power outages, or connectivity issues, potentially disrupting the prayer

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experience. In such instances, it is not advisable to compel participation in virtual Friday prayer, underscoring the importance of flexibility in Islamic jurisprudence.

Accordingly, Islamic guidance offers the option to replace the obligatory Friday congregational prayer with four rak'at Dhuhr (midday) prayers as a dispensation (*rukhsah*) under extenuating circumstances. This allowance ensures that individuals can fulfill their religious obligations without undue hardship, recognizing the practical challenges posed by virtual worship formats. These considerations highlight the nuanced approach within Islamic jurisprudence to accommodate the faithful during exceptional times while upholding the integrity and significance of religious practices.

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